



NOVA School of Business and Economics

# WORK PROJECT

MSc in Management

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**Business Project:** How to Improve Efficiency  
and Effectiveness in Communication between  
Oracle Direct and its Customers

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## **1 Brief context of the business project**

Oracle is an American multinational computer technology corporation founded in 1977 and headquartered in California. The company develops and markets both computer hardware systems and software products to work together in the best possible integrated way. Oracle's mission is "to eliminate complexity and simplify IT, enabling customers to accelerate innovation and create added value for their customers".

Oracle Direct, a company within Oracle, is responsible for inside sales (remote sales). Remote sales are those in which there isn't a physical contact between the company and the customer. Hence, all the interaction is done through communication systems such as the telephone or the e-mail. Oracle Direct' aim is to increase Oracle's customer base, to help in the management of high volume transactional sales and to be the point of contact for most customers with Oracle Corporation. Oracle Direct is also responsible for the management of existing partners and for the identification of potential solutions to their needs, as well as the selection and training of high-potential sales professionals.

The objective of the Business Project (BP) was to provide recommendations to Oracle Direct on how to become the best inside sales organization in the IT industry. More specifically we were asked to focus on Oracle Direct' external communication being our challenge as follows: "How to Improve Efficiency and Effectiveness in Communication between Oracle Direct and its Customers". Our team was asked to present the communication tools and techniques which we believe to be of the best utility for inside sales companies. These tools and techniques could be existing ones or new ones that Oracle wasn't yet aware of.

Since the project was focused specifically on the communication process, the market competitiveness as well as the current client situation of Oracle Direct wasn't really relevant. Our team had to bear in mind other market players but only in what concerned the communication tools or techniques they use. As for Oracle Direct' client base, it was more relevant to understand their behavior towards remote sales or communication tools/techniques rather than their size or purchasing rate for example.

In order for our team to provide effective recommendations we had to go through different research stages. In fact, I can say that this BP was mainly research based. The first stage of our research was done within Oracle Direct. Our team needed to diagnose this big and complex corporation in order to understand what it already does. For that, several on-site

interviews with different Oracle Direct' employees relevant for the scope of this project were conducted. After assessing how things worked in Oracle, we decided to take a closer look at other practices within the IT industry. Some of them were found in major clients or competitors of Oracle Direct, like LinkedIn, Google and Dropbox which we had the chance to meet personally. Aiming to expand our horizons we also searched for best practices outside of the IT industry. We looked at different case studies on tools and techniques used in other sectors. Ford is an example of a company we took a close look at. Alongside with this multi-level research, we also searched on the web for other communication tools that the market has to offer. The last stage of our research consisted of deeply analyzing the most relevant tools that we came across, in order to decide which ones to recommend to Oracle. We developed a ranking model, within which we have compared several proposals based on different criteria. Finally, it's also worth stating that we have always taken into consideration the current or upcoming trends that directly affect Oracle's business. Technological trends such as mobile and internet-on-things are very important for Oracle to take into account. Consumer related trends such as social media or the importance of face-to-face contact are also crucial.

Although being already very efficient regarding external communication, we concluded that there is still potential for improvement. Oracle should keep in mind the big picture when communicating with its clients. This is why, when developing our proposals, we decided to take a holistic approach to external communication and to consider all steps sales people go through to communicate with clients. For each of these steps we recommended the adoption or better use of different tools. To establish a good relationship with customers, it's important to find the right people to contact and to gather the right information. Having this in mind we proposed the use of different **research tools**. Having a lot of content available, it's important to manage it the right way, to ensure that customers receive targeted information and are not overloaded with advertisements. For this we have proposed **content optimization tools** that ensure an easier engagement process. Keeping in mind that the **website** is a very important lead generation tool, we suggested ways of making it more user friendly. Finally, we also recommended the use of actual **communication technologies**. Nevertheless, as technologies are constantly changing, Oracle has to mind the future and continuously look at upcoming ones. The recommendations given in the BP are possibilities to tackle all of these areas and can help Oracle to become the best inside sales organization in the IT industry.

## 2 Further development of a specific topic

Prior to start working on the BP, our team had some induction days at Oracle EMEA Headquarters in Dublin. Several meetings were scheduled by Carmel O'Boyle, our project manager on the company's side. The idea behind these intensive meetings had two stages. The first was to explain Oracle to our team. As I have stated in this report, Oracle is a huge corporation. Hence, we couldn't go very deep in many subjects. However, this training was still crucial for us to get an overview of how things work in the company. The second intention behind these days of training was to help us in defining the scope of our project and to provide us the most detailed information possible on topics related to our BP.

Right in the very beginning, when learning about Oracle Direct we came across something that raised a lot of questions from our side. We have identified another big problem that we believe Oracle has to tackle: **Internal Communication and Cooperation**. Oracle is perfectly aware of this issue and agreed with most of the comments we made back then. Nevertheless, since the scope of our BP was focused externally, we haven't really dealt with the situation internally. Over time, while working on our project we couldn't help notice how linked internal communication and cooperation is with the topic we were working on (external communication). Together with the company we decided to move forward with our proposed challenge, assuming that the internal situation was or would be solved, and so it wouldn't negatively impact our recommendations. Actually, in the last section of our BP' report, entitled "Next Steps", our team highlights the importance of focusing on the company's internal processes in order to achieve better results in what concerns external interaction. Taking all of these into account, I can say that internal processes are something Oracle Direct should urge to bear in mind in the near future and so this is the topic I want to further develop in this Work Project (WP).

In order to understand how internal communication and cooperation works at Oracle Direct and how it affects the relationship with customers, it's important to look at how Oracle Direct is organized internally.

Oracle Direct offers a huge range of products, which are grouped into different segments. The big portfolio offered is a consequence of the fast growth that the company has experienced over the years. Such growth is not only due to internal development but it is

also highly associated with series of acquisitions that have complemented Oracle Corporation throughout the years (e.g.: Sun Microsystems). Today, the company claims that its main competitive advantage is its ability to provide customers a whole stack of integrated IT solutions (hardware and software): Storage, Servers, Virtual Machines, Operating Systems, Databases, Middleware and Applications (see figure 1 in appendix).<sup>1</sup>

Aiming to ensure focused and knowledgeable sales representatives, Oracle divided its sales organization into three different teams. There are the App Sales Team (focused on Applications), the Tech Sales Team (focused on Middleware and Databases) and the Systems Sales Team (focusing on Operating Systems, Virtual Machines, Servers and Storage). On one hand, such division makes a whole lot of sense. Actually, every product is very complex in its own way and it's nearly impossible to have sales representatives who are able to master every single solution offered by the company. This becomes even more clear if we think that a big part of the products (hardware or software) were developed by a totally different company in a totally different way and now just belong to Oracle because Oracle has acquired such company. On the other hand, this **segmentation is in the root of the internal problem we want to address in this WP.**

This division within Oracle Direct makes it difficult for the company to communicate with its clients as having one identity and clients sometimes receive several uncoordinated calls from different sales professionals, which does not foster the customer experience. In other words, each segment of the company is independent not only in what concerns sales representatives but also in what regards customers. To illustrate this, let's assume I am the CEO of an enterprise. I can have Oracle's databases already installed in my company, and one day I might need some applications. The databases sales person won't be able to help me. The most he can do is to follow my query up to the applications division who will do their best to sell me their solutions. But what if what I really need is middleware but since I don't have a clue of what middleware is I don't even realize I need it? (This happens quite often in the IT industry) Well, here is where another problem shows up. The applications' sales representative won't care less if what I need is middleware because his goal is to sell me applications. And even if he can't do any more business with me, he might not even recommend me some middleware solutions. This

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<sup>1</sup> For brief explanation of each product category offered by the company please refer to section 3.1 (Sales Department Organization) of the Business Project Report

can happen either because he doesn't have any incentive to do so or because he also doesn't know enough about middleware to be able to recall middleware products as solutions to my pains.

This existing segmentation can naturally lead to several problems in the way the company interacts with its customers. But things can get even worse. If we look at the way sales cycles are designed we realize there are also several customer contact points in each segment (see figure 2 in Appendix). We realized this after several interviews with different Oracle employees. In general, the Business Development Group (BDG) is the first direct point of contact with the customer. The BDG looks for prospective clients and does the necessary background research. The first interest calls to see if the prospect is a potential new customer are carried out by this team as well. If interest calls are successful, the Pre-Sales Managers step into the process to find out more about the customer's pains. This interaction is called "discovery call". The following steps can involve preparing demos for the clients in order to show them the functions and benefits of the promoted solution. When all the problems are identified, the client is passed on to the sales representatives who engage with the client to close the deal. They are also responsible to keep in contact with the client and nurture a relationship for further upselling opportunities. They also carry out their own research in order to find out more about their clients and to be aware of future changes within their companies. In some occasions, client success managers take over clients from Inside Sales in order to sustain and develop a relationship and to do upselling as well. All instances do their own research and try to be up-to-date about clients' actions in order to identify new selling opportunities. These different points of contact exist in each of the three company's segments. Returning to the CEO example, right now I not only have to contact different departments of the company concerning different solutions, but I also need to talk to different people in each department depending in which phase of sales cycle I am. All of this will affect Oracle's communication with my company and thus my experience as a consumer.

Although the "internal architecture" of Oracle Direct might be discussable, the high complexity of the products and services offered by the company, makes it quite hard to change. Despite that, one would expect Oracle employees to work together in the best possible way to try minimize the negative impact of several customer points of contact. However, no one really cooperates within Oracle Direct. Why? Because no one really has the incentives to do so. Since the sales representatives are paid based on commission they

stand in a strong competition with each other for selling as many of their products as possible to a customer. They are thus (at least financially) not incentivized to collaborate with their colleagues. The incentive system also puts a certain pressure on the employees to reach their own targets, which again hinders collaboration.

So, what can I propose to foster collaboration within Oracle Direct? Change the rewarding system? According to what Oracle told our BP team, such change is almost impossible to implement, and thus it is not really a solution. Having this in mind, for the purpose of this WP, I want to focus on possibilities which don't imply changing the current rewarding system. Hence, I will explain what my methodology would be in order to identify possible non-monetary rewards that would increase collaboration. I will also try to outline some possible solutions, although limited to the size and time frame of this WP.

The methodology I would adopt to understand how to tackle Oracle Direct internal issues wouldn't be very different from the one our team followed while studying external communication in the BP. First, it would be crucial to go a little deeper than we have gone in assessing Oracle Direct' internal processes, communication, cooperation, practices and so on. Such **internal research** would help uncovering, I believe, the company's barriers to internal collaboration and communication. Without a deep research, I personally predict that such barriers could be found within both the company' systems (e.g.: intranet; customer relationship management applications; OSN<sup>2</sup>) and the company' people (e.g.: knowledge sharing processes; interpersonal communication). Alongside with the internal analysis, an **external research** would also be crucial to understand the best way to fight Oracle's internal issues. Externally, as we have done in the BP, I would look for best practices within and outside the IT industry. **Case-studies** like Google would also be very interesting to look at in a deeper way. Google is a great example of an IT company which has been able to foster internal cooperation very well. Among several other things, this big American multinational invests a lot in the design of its offices. As an example, it provides a lot of open space so that employees can easily go there and talk either with a customer or with each other, sharing their ideas. Furthermore, search for **formal literature** would also be significant in order to find out what experts' and academics' have to say about collaborative and communicative efforts within a firm. I can recall, for

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<sup>2</sup> OSN (Oracle Social Network): It is the Oracle's internal social network which includes functions such as creating personal profiles, following other employees, group messages, status updates, among others.



instances, from the “Positive Organizations” course I took during the MSc in Management, the paper “Building a Collaborative Workspace” (C Callahan, S. Schenk, M. and White, N.) in which a list of actions, behaviors and skills needed to enhance collaboration is identified. According to the authors of this paper, in order to improve collaboration, employees must know each other’s work, communication and learning styles and must additionally have a certain admiration for the skills and abilities of fellow team-mates. The organization, on the other hand, must implement regular social activities to build up new social connections and trust among team members. The authors argue that connections between teams, communities and their larger networks can also be formed as sources of new ideas and innovation. They also defend that collaboration must be supported from the technological side. Therefore, an organization has to appreciate how an effective use of social technology will save time and assist collaboration. This way, the authors conclude that a technology which stores and retrieves information of interest and makes it immediately findable to everyone must be developed at any company. (Callahan et al., 2008). Last but not least, a good research would also need to bear in mind the **current or upcoming trends** that affect Oracle Direct’ internal processes. As a final result of such analysis, I believe I would be able to **propose different recommendations** to Oracle Direct. The implementation of these recommendations would hopefully allow the company to facilitate and enhance internal communication, collaboration and connectivity among its employees without significantly changing the rewarding system. This implies that collaborative efforts from the employees’ side would be expected to increase and processes would thus be expected to be more efficient.

Attending to the purpose of this WP, I haven’t really done a deep and reliable research on the internal side of Oracle Direct. Nevertheless, based on the insights I was able to gather throughout the development of the BP as well as on the things I have concluded with the further development of this topic in this WP, I find important to outline some possible recommendations that I believe a more detailed research would sustain. Such **recommendations** would aim at the barriers to internal collaboration and communication identified earlier in this report.

Concerning the **company’ systems** (e.g.: intranet; customer relationship management applications; OSN), I think the lack of commitment from the employees is the biggest issue. Although providing to the world the best databases and integrated IT systems, Oracle in general isn’t able to take advantage of their own tools internally. We realized

that sales representatives are all working in a different way, using different tools. In my opinion, Oracle Direct should assess what tools are being used by which sales representatives. It would also be important to foster the usage of Oracle's **CRM system**, so that all the information about clients is stored in one database and not in many different excel sheets (most of sales representatives are currently doing this). By having all the information about clients or prospects stored in the same system, the search for other employees looking after the same client account would be facilitated for example. This, in turn, would avoid problems like the over communication with one single customer. Regarding the **OSN**, I believe this tool has a lot of potential if used properly. Hence, Oracle Direct should definitely encourage its employees to use it more. This could be done by simplifying the OSN, standardizing internal communication via the OSN or integrating it better into the mailing system. As for **Oracle's intranet**, basing my reasoning on the feedback of different sales representatives, my recommendation would be to make it easier to use, simplifying the search for information. Actually, from what I understood, the company's intranet is not used to its full potential mainly because it's just too hard to find information on it.

Starring now at the **company' people** as the other barrier to internal collaboration and communication, several ideas can be proposed to achieve a common goal: change the behavior of Oracle Direct' employees. First, it's important to **simplify and standardize the communication** between various employees and to develop guidelines for the usage of different knowledge and content sharing tools. Secondly, I also recommend that Oracle **encourages more the development of informal relationships**. Such relationships will enable a friendlier working environment and thus enhance the employees' job satisfaction, commitment and willingness to cooperate. The building of informal relationships can be promoted by introducing sports or social events for example, which would give employees the chance to meet colleagues outside of their team or their "usual circle". Thirdly, I would also propose the implementation of a program that would **highlight and reward best practice behavior concerning collaboration**. As a last example of a possible recommendation, Oracle should also **redesign its office spaces** in order to promote more conversations and thus idea-sharing among employees. All these suggested measures aim at providing means to the employees through which they can actively include themselves in the working life and also exchange knowledge with their colleagues.

### **3 Reflection on Learning**

During my academic life I had quite a few chances to analyze real case-studies. In some academic projects that I've took part I also had the opportunity to interact directly with specific companies. However, none of those experiences were like the one I had while working on the BP. This course was a challenging learning opportunity for me. At such high level, this was the first time that I was able to work for a company as an external consultant. The opportunity to help Oracle Direct on improving its external communication was for me the best way of closing my academic life.

When thinking about the business field in which this BP best fits, I am of the opinion that marketing is the one. Actually, the challenges our team had to address were mainly marketing related. Our task was, as we have seen, to bring more efficiency and effectiveness to what links the company and its customers: its communicative interaction. Having this in mind, I have to say that the marketing major I acquired throughout my MSc in Management at NovaSBE had a very important role in the development of this BP. For instances, Marketing courses such as "Consumer Behavior" and "Marketing Across Cultures" have contributed to a better analysis and understanding of Oracle' customers across the EMEA Region. Moreover, my enrollment in the "Brand Management" course also turned out to be highly significant for the development of this project. In "Brand Management" class I had the chance, for the first time, to get a real taste of what working as a marketing consultant is like. In this course I was part of a team of student consultants and we were given the challenge of suggesting improvements to Unilever concerning one of its brands. The way the class was designed worked out incredibly well, representing, in my opinion, a very important rehearsal for the MIM BP.

As for new things experienced with this BP, I think it is important to highlight a couple related with work methodology. The first one regards research. Oracle is an IT company and a big part of our task was to look at other IT companies' practices. Our team was settled in Dublin (Ireland) which is one of the world's biggest hubs for IT and so decided to take advantage of that. In most school projects that I have worked for, the research was mainly done through the web or libraries. In this one, we were all in the European Silicon Valley which turned out to be perfect for on-site research. Hence, we had the chance to schedule personal meetings with different IT companies such as Salesforce.com. The main advantage of this type of research is that it is completely tailored to us. The second

thing I want to highlight is the high contact we had with Oracle Direct. If in the project for Unilever, we had a lot more contact with the course' professor and only presented results to the client from time to time, in the case of the BP, the approach was quite inversed. In the BP our most frequent contact was with the company. We were always working side by side with our client and from time to time, we had to follow-up with the university about our progress and results found. This approach has contributed a lot, in my opinion, to an improvement of our project management skills.

Starring now internally at the team I was part of, I have to say our motivation wasn't really questionable, especially right after such enthusiastic pitch from the company. From our team, Oracle could expect our best effort. It's undoubtedly, in my opinion, that the BP has an extra amount of pressure due to the fact that we are not just working for another school paper. In such a project, our names are in the hands of an important company. Oracle Direct was expecting something from us and so we were willing to work even harder than we would for a regular project. Besides some misunderstandings that we have had with the scope of our project and some difficulties we sometimes had in reaching the right people we needed to talk to, I think our team can say that our relationship with Oracle Direct was very good and very well managed. As I said, Carmel was our point of contact in the organization. I'm pretty sure she gave her best in helping us out with everything. Sometimes we could even understand how she was "fighting" for us within Oracle in trying to get people out of their tasks to be interviewed.

In what concerns my individual contribution to this project I am overall very satisfied. I believe I met my team expectations as well as the ones Oracle Direct had. Naturally, there were some idle times during the project that kind of threw my motivation down a little. This was mostly due to some bottlenecks that we had come across while researching. But most of the time I believe I can say I was pretty ready to get things going. One thing that kind of frustrated me a bit during this project was the length of it. This might be related with the fact that the semester in Dublin is quite short. I know it's important to give us short term projects in a way we can really focus on what's priority and also feel the pressure of working under tight deadlines, like in the real world. However, I still think that if we had more time to work on this project we could deliver even better proposals to Oracle. Things take time to start. Then the break around Saint Patrick's holiday kind of reduced the company's availability to help us out. And suddenly we were about to present our recommendations and conclusions.

## 4 Bibliography

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*This Work Project (WP) is also indirectly based on all the research done with the aim of developing the Business Project (BP) stated above. This way, some of the ideas exposed in this WP might not be referenced in this bibliography. In such case, please refer to the Bibliography of the indicated BP.*

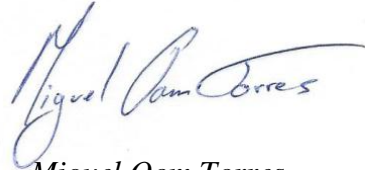
## 5 Declaration

I confirm that this paper is solely my own work. Although partially based on the Business Project elaborated by a team that I was part of, this specific paper has neither been previously submitted for assessment nor published.

All material which is quoted is accurately indicated as such, and I have acknowledged all sources employed fully and accurately.

I agree with a plagiarism check of this paper. Furthermore I am completely aware that failure to comply with such requirements is a breach of rules and will result in resubmission, loss of marks, failure and/or disciplinary action.

*Lisbon, 15<sup>th</sup> of May, 2014*



*Miguel Oom Torres*

6    **Appendix**



Figure 1: Oracle Solutions (Source: Own illustration)

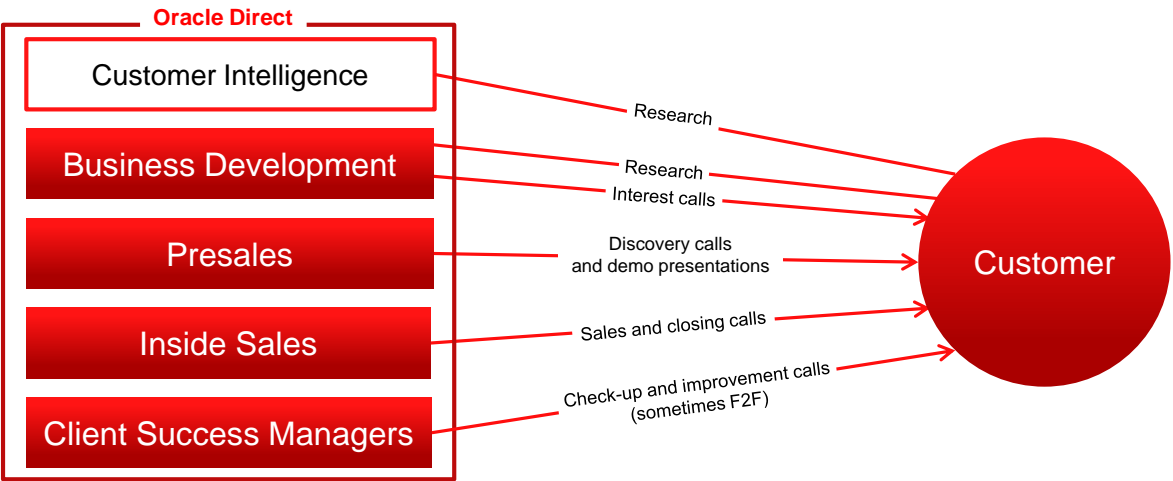


Figure 2: Different points of contact (Source: Own illustration)